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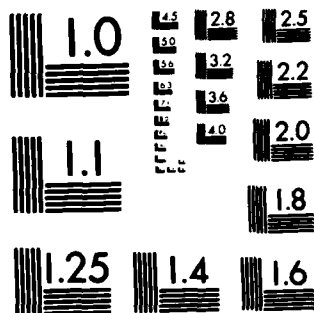
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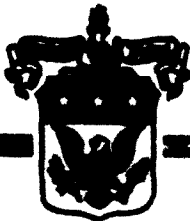
### OPERATIONAL ART AND THE JENA CAMPAIGN

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HUGH F. BOYD III

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"Operational Art" and an understanding of Clausewitz' "Center of Gravity."

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

OPERATIONAL ART AND THE JENA CAMPAIGN  
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Hugh F. Boyd III, EN

Professor Jay Luvaas  
Project Adviser

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Hugh F. Boyd III, LTC, EN

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A topic of great interest in the US Army today is the concept of the "Operational Level" of war or "Operational Art", as it is sometimes called. Napoleon demonstrated a great appreciation for the "Operational Art" and his campaigns serve as excellent studies for us today. It is through such a study that commanders can increase their knowledge and better apply the "Art" aspect of the Profession of Arms. The Jena Campaign is one in which Napoleon defeated, in detail, a superior force through application of the "Operational Art" and an understanding of Clausewitz's "Center of Gravity".

The Inchon landing in September 1950 was the last "Operational Level" campaign conducted by the United States Army. Between then and 1982 little was mentioned in doctrinal literature concerning the way to conduct operations in a theater of war. (Operational Level) As a bridge between strategy and tactics, the operational level boils down to campaigns in theaters of war. It usually will involve Corps, Armies, and Army Groups but should not be thought of as size related. The US Army would be guilty of serious neglect were it to fight a campaign of such a scale without its leadership being trained to do so. The ability to maneuver and position forces on the battlefield with the concentration of firepower at the time and place of choosing in order to, not necessarily win the battle but the campaign is an "Art" that must be studied by our leaders.

The wars of Napoleon Bonaparte serve as the model for the study of the Operational Art. Napoleon's campaigns contained an appreciation of a broader concept of war that had been lacking to that time. It is not that war had not been previously studied nor that Great Captains did not exist. Napoleon was able to zero in on what was required to win the campaign. He understood, like other Captains before him, those principles of war and sound tactics which win battles. Napoleon, however, was able to look beyond those battles and make the bold moves that shortened his campaigns and resulted in victory. Long campaigns were not politically



popular, so a rapid conclusion was desirable. The pushing of an enemy back along his line of communications usually solved nothing and took a long time doing it. As a matter of fact he had cautioned his subordinates against attacking an enemy that had been in place a long time and was entrenched. While he did not refer to it as such, Napoleon was aware of both the enemy and friendly "Centers of Gravity". He had an appreciation of his corps' capabilities and those of the enemy. He saw lines of communication as a vulnerability and minimized his dependence on them. The result was an army "free" to rapidly maneuver when and where it wanted against an enemy tied to his LOC. I have selected the Campaign of Jena as a vehicle to look at the Operational Level because it is at that level that it was a complete victory.

#### BACKGROUND

Following the war in 1805 with Austria, France negotiated peace treaties with both Austria and Prussia. Prussia failed to ratify the treaty so Napoleon left his forces scattered throughout southern Germany. He did so to (1) keep them in a central location between Austria and Prussia, (2) put pressure on Prussia, and (3) place the burden of feeding and supplying the troops on someone besides France. Napoleon's objective was to create a Confederation of the Rhine consisting of the Central and South German states. Of course, they would be allied with France against

her enemies who from time to time were Prussia, England, Russia, Austria, Sweden, and Italy. It is ironic that collectively they could have defeated Napoleon at almost anytime of his Empire, but did not do so until 1815.

The efforts by Napoleon angered and concerned the Austrians but they were still recovering from their recent defeat. Those efforts very much concerned the Prussians and prompted an alliance effort with England and Russia as well as a Prussian mobilization. The German State of Saxony became the state of contention with both France and Prussia wanting her in their "camps". The French interfered with Prussian-English relations by offering Hannover, which was the origin of King George's grandfather, to the English. As a matter of fact King George III of England was also King of Hannover.

Prussia mobilized on 10 August with the expectation that it would probably mean war with France but with the hope that France would accept her demands and war could be avoided. Prussia was expecting help from her allies. England's army was in no position to help, and Russia was always slow to react; in part because of the great distance. This strategic miscalculation certainly hurt the Prussians at Jena but was not the cause for their defeat.

In order to set the Jena Campaign in the proper context I believe we ought to examine a few differences between the French and Prussian armies, because it was precisely those differences that Napoleon could exploit in his campaign plan

that led to his total success. Military leaders today are taught to "know your enemy", but I wonder if we realize that at the Operational level, those enemy strengths and weaknesses are particularly significant.

The Prussian army consisted of a confederation of units. The armies frequently belonged to kings or princes who led them. The staffs were weak and orders to units at the lowest levels were all prepared at the General Officer headquarters. That meant precious time was required to produce the many copies of orders. Thus a simple movement order took a long time to execute. The movement of the Prussian army averaged 5 to 10 miles per day. The French, on the other hand, had strong staffs and each subordinate headquarters issued its own orders to its subordinates. The information flow and thus the execution were therefore much faster. The movement of the French army averaged 20 to 35 miles per day. You can imagine the advantage of an army that moves 2 to 7 times faster than its opponent.<sup>2</sup>

The standard procedure of that day was to analyze the battle in the afternoon and issue the orders for the next day. Napoleon believed that the procedure led to faulty plans because of the time delay between unit reports, upon which plans were made, and the start of the next day's battle. He therefore developed the habit of sleeping after supper while the reports from his commanders were being collected. He would awaken at midnight, analyze those reports, and issue his orders in time for morning execution.

His orders were therefore based on 6 to 8 hours more current information than his enemy's.<sup>3</sup>

The French also realized the vulnerability of lines of communications. In an effort to minimize that vulnerability they learned to live off the land, to travel light, and to establish multiple lines for the necessary supplies. A line of communication is also frequently a route of withdrawal. The Prussians were very concerned about their withdrawal routes and wanted them protected. Napoleon did not plan to withdraw and therefore was not as concerned about it. Battle and war are at every level functions of the state of mind. If soldiers and leaders permit themselves to be held hostage by fear concerning their supply and/or withdrawal lines, they are vulnerable. Napoleon recognized that vulnerability in his enemy and took advantage of it.

A final difference was that the Prussians attempted to save lives in each battle, whereas the French were concerned with the length of the campaign and the resulting drain on France's economy and resources. The Prussians were fighting battles while Napoleon was fighting a campaign.<sup>4</sup>

#### PREPARATION FOR WAR

Even though Prussia mobilized on 10 Aug 1806, a plan for "throwing Napoleon west of the Rhine River" was not presented for approval until 25 Sep.<sup>5</sup> On 26 Sep an ultimatum was sent to Napoleon to be answered by 8 Oct. Napoleon received the

ultimatum on 7 Oct with no intent on complying. Furthermore, he had begun to react to the Prussian activity on 5 Sep. The Prussian's failure to react more rapidly after the decision to mobilize worked to their disadvantage. The French and Prussian forces were distributed in early September as shown on Map 1.

On 5 Sep Napoleon gave his VII, IV, and VI Corps a "be prepared" order. Those Corps were to be in Bamberg in 8 days upon word to execute. That would leave those forces within 10 days of Berlin. While Napoleon had no specific plan, he knew that a move on Berlin would disrupt whatever the enemy had in mind and that his superior mobility would present him with favorable position. Napoleon had not lost sight of the fact that it is the enemy force, not a city, that is generally the decisive objective. He knew that by orienting his forces on Berlin he could develop excellent possibilities for defeating the Prussian army. From the very beginning Napoleon was thinking at the "Operational Level" of war. While an appreciation of tactics is important to a commander at the operational level, he must not permit himself to be dragged to that lower level at the expense of the higher.

As events in September evolved, Napoleon's plans solidified. He ordered his brother King Louis of Holland to guard the Rhine and the northern approaches to the west. He developed two lines of communication and an alternate. They were Mainz to Frankfurt to Wuerzburg to Bamberg; Augsburg to Ansbach to Nuernberg to Bamberg; and, the alternate, Mannheim

to Wuerzburg to Bamberg. In addition Napoleon moved his forces to the vicinity of Wuerzburg and Bamberg. With his forces in position and intelligence showing the enemy forces at Erfurt, Napoleon issued the first part of his plan.

France was fortunate that nothing ever happened to Napoleon during a campaign because he seldom shared his thoughts on the total concept with anyone. Jena was an example of his not sharing, and had Napoleon died, the French army would have found itself deployed without anyone understanding the concept.

At any rate, the plan was for the cavalry to screen the left front so the French forces could be shifted to the right.<sup>6</sup> He hoped the Prussians would believe him to be stretched thin along his line of communications. After establishing that deception he would attack to Leipzig threatening Prussia's line of communications. It would seem that here is Napoleon's appreciation for the Operational Art. He moved his center of mass around the flank of the enemy, avoiding that enemy center of mass, and positioning his concentrated forces where they would be at a distinct advantage in battle. Having to turn back and fight a major battle along your line of communications has an adverse effect on the will of the soldiers and leaders.

Napoleon continued to evaluate his plan as additional enemy information was obtained. While obviously the prudent thing to do, a Napoleon strength was to not panic every time additional information was received. The courage to stay

with a good plan is important. Napoleon did look for opportunities, however, to take advantage of enemy mistakes. He wargamed in his head the possible and probable enemy courses of action. In this particular situation, he expected either a withdrawal of Prussian forces back to Magdeburg or their advance onto his line of communications at Wuerzburg. In the latter case he felt he could drive them into the Rhine.<sup>7</sup>

During the early part of the execution, Napoleon ensured that his forces could be concentrated within 48 hours should the need arise. We shall see throughout this campaign that Napoleon's ability to concentrate his power when necessary and/or to position his forces in order to threaten the enemy is key to the exercise of the Operational Art.

The Prussians continued to operate from poor intelligence and failed to concentrate forces. As a matter of fact when they discovered that Napoleon was not protecting his line of communications they dispatched a force of 11,000 to interrupt it. As was discussed earlier that was to have negligible effect but it did reduce the available Prussian force by 11,000.

Through 11 Oct, Napoleon was convinced the Prussians were still planning to attack his left and that his massing to the right, threatening an attack on the Prussian line of communication, held the best prospects for victory. Napoleon's forces did continue to mass and to march in the desired direction. As an example of the French forces

ability to move, Legendre's Brigade of VII Corps marched 25, 24, 21, 30, 30, 25, 25, 20, and 20 miles in nine consecutive days. <sup>8</sup> The ability of an army to move and sustain itself is a key ingredient to the Airland Battle and Operational Art.

On the night of 11-12 Oct Napoleon's intelligence showed the enemy center of mass at Erfurt. Being between the enemy and Dresden, Napoleon believed the time was right to swing his force and attack. Hindsight tells us that perhaps he had not penetrated as far into the enemy rear as he could have before turning to fight. At any rate on the morning of 12 Oct, information indicating a Prussian withdrawal, and possible escape, reached Napoleon. His response was to send part of his force northward to intercept the withdrawal while attacking with the remainder of his force to fix the enemy in place. Only a commander with confidence in his intelligence, his forces, his subordinate commanders, and himself would split his forces and attempt such a move. The stage was now set for the fighting to begin. The Jena Campaign consisted of three parts: Battle of Jena, Battle of Auerstaedt, and the Pursuit. I will attempt to focus on the Operational Level in examining the three parts, although some tactical considerations and impacts are important to our study.

The position of forces on 12 Oct is shown on Map 2. Lannes' V Corps and Augereau's VII Corps were moving up the west bank of the Saale River toward Jena to fix the enemy in place. The enemy was not withdrawing and as a matter of fact could have massed forces against Napoleon's two Corps and



ruined their day. The Prussian command structure was flawed and their intelligence concerning the French was almost nonexistent. They lost the opportunity to attack, became concerned about their relative strength and chose to withdraw to consolidate with Wuerttemberg's reserve and await the return of Saxe-Weimar who with 11,000 men had been sent to Wuerzburg to disrupt Napoleon's line of communication. The Prussian plan to accomplish that was, for Hohenlohe to hold at Jena to protect the withdrawal, for Ruechel to back him up at Weimar, and for Brunswick to withdraw to Merseburg to join Wuerttemberg. Saxe-Weimar was to join Ruechel and then they were to withdraw to join Brunswick.

Late on 13 Oct, Napoleon saw the main Prussian army still in place around Weimar and decided to attack them as soon as he could mass his available forces (those minus I and III Corps, although their orders were to march to the sound of the guns at Jena and turn the Prussian left flank). Napoleon estimated 100,000 Prussians before him at Jena against his own 55,000. He knew he could have an additional 40,000 by noon on the 14th. The remainder of his force at Naumburg could not arrive before mid-afternoon on the 14th. That gave the Prussians superiority if they could concentrate and take the initiative. Napoleon was determined to not let that happen by maintaining the offensive. "There are moments in war when no consideration should override the advantage of anticipated, the enemy and striking first." Knowledge of the enemy and making him fight on your terms are ingredients in

the operational level and were used to great benefit at Jena. On the night of 13-14 Oct the orders were given. The main French force would attack from Jena northwest; Davout's III Corps would attack down from Naumburg to hit the enemy rear at Apolda; and Bernadotte's I Corps, if with Davout, was to support him. If not with him, he was to attack from Dornburg to the west. Unfortunately for the French, Brunswick's army was moving north but fortunately for the French at only one mile per hour. You can see the distinct advantage that movement in the theater gave to the French.

#### BATTLE OF JENA

In looking at the Battle of Jena from an operational standpoint we have only a few points of interest. As the attack began, Ney's VI Corps was to the rear and was to form on Lannes' right flank. When Ney's advance guard arrived they found the right covered by St. H. Laine's division so they marched behind Lannes and took up on his left. The other significant item was that Hohenlohe called for Ruechel to move forward to reinforce him at 0800. At 1000 Ruechel began to move and he arrived on the battlefield some six miles away at 1400. By then the Prussian ranks had begun to break up and little could be done. Fighting on both sides was bravely conducted with excellent low level leadership, but Napoleon won it by moving more rapidly, massing superior strength on the battlefield, and choosing the time and place

of battle to favor his army. The Battle of Jena was not won tactically but operationally.

#### BATTLE OF AUERSTADT

At the conclusion of the Battle of Jena, Napoleon realized he had not fought the entire Prussian army and became concerned about Davout and Bernadotte, as well he should have. Upon receipt of Napoleon's orders on 14 Oct, Bernadotte concluded that he was to be at Dornburg. As a result, he proceeded in that direction leaving Davout to attack on his own. Even during his march south as he heard the battle at Auerstadt he refused to return and assist. One French corps under the command of Bernadotte did not fight at Jena nor at Auerstadt but lingered enroute to Dornburg and Apolda.<sup>10</sup>

Davout with 26,000 was carrying out his orders to attack southwest when he encountered Brunswick's 63,000. Badly outnumbered Davout went on the defensive from the best terrain. He deftly shifted forces from one part of the battlefield to another, constantly denying the enemy the advantage he sought. After those initial successes, Davout went on the offensive, double enveloped an army twice his size and routed it from the battlefield.

The interesting thing about the Battle of Auerstadt is that it was not essential to Napoleon's achieving his goal of defeating the Prussian army. However, to obtain complete

victory would have required a subsequent battle and may not have been as decisive in the end. It never hurts to have great subordinate commanders like Davout to execute your campaign plan and to deal with the "friction" of war. Had Bernadotte stayed and fought with Davout the battle would have never been in doubt.

#### PURSUIT

On the morning of 15 Oct, Napoleon issued his orders for the pursuit of the Prussian army. He still was lacking information concerning the Battle of Auerstadt but was thinking ahead in order to complete the destruction of the enemy forces. His initial concept in September was to drive to Berlin in order to turn the enemy. In the pursuit that approach was still valid. It was important to keep the French army between the Prussian and Russian armies. In order to keep the pressure on the Prussian army, the I, IV, and VI Corps would pursue and maintain contact with the enemy as they withdrew. As information concerning Auerstadt became clear, Napoleon gave the order for the rest of the army to move to Berlin preventing the Prussians from regrouping and joining with the Russians. This movement coupled with the constant pressure from the three corps moving up the west axis (see Map 4) further demoralized the Prussians and led to their total destruction as a fighting force. As in the earlier part of the campaign, the ability to move faster, the

ability to mass forces at the key time and place, and the confidence, from leader to soldier, that victory was theirs won the day for the French.

While small skirmishes and battles were frequently in doubt, the campaign was not. Napoleon looked at the campaign from the operational level, considering, of course, the tactical situation of his subordinate units, maneuvered his forces into position where the campaign, and not necessarily all the battles, would be won. The lesson to learn and apply in the late 20th Century is that the theater commander commands large units with the mission to win the campaign. He must train his forces to move, to mass when necessary, to be confident of victory at the campaign level regardless of what is happening in their small area, and to sustain themselves throughout. That theater commander who can develop that force and determine that frequently elusive, obscure set of circumstances that will defeat the enemy will understand the "Operational Level" of war and be rewarded with victory.

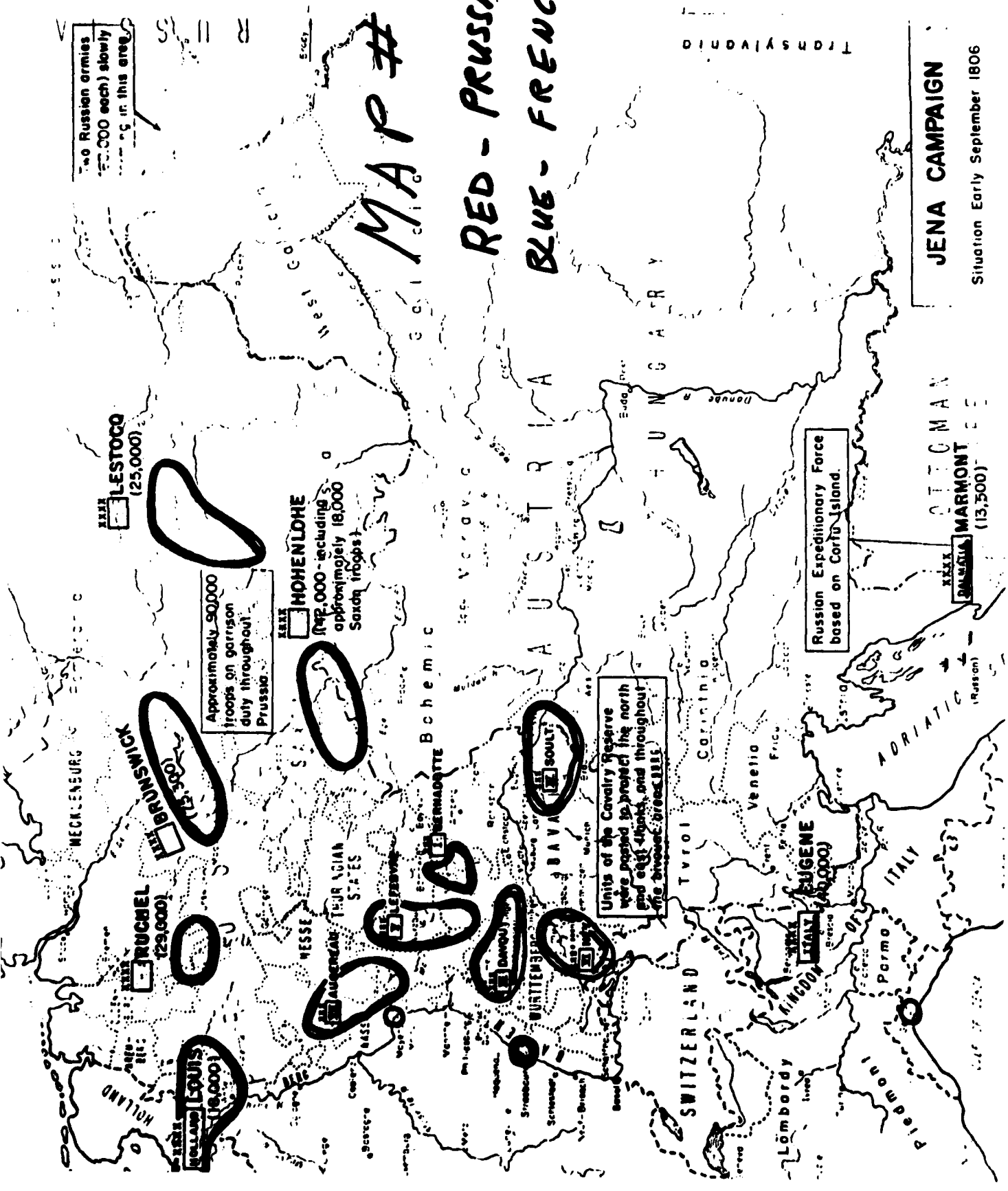
Two Russian armies  
(200,000 each) slowly  
moving in this area

MAP #1

RED - PRUSSIAN  
BLUE - FRENCH

JENA CAMPAIGN

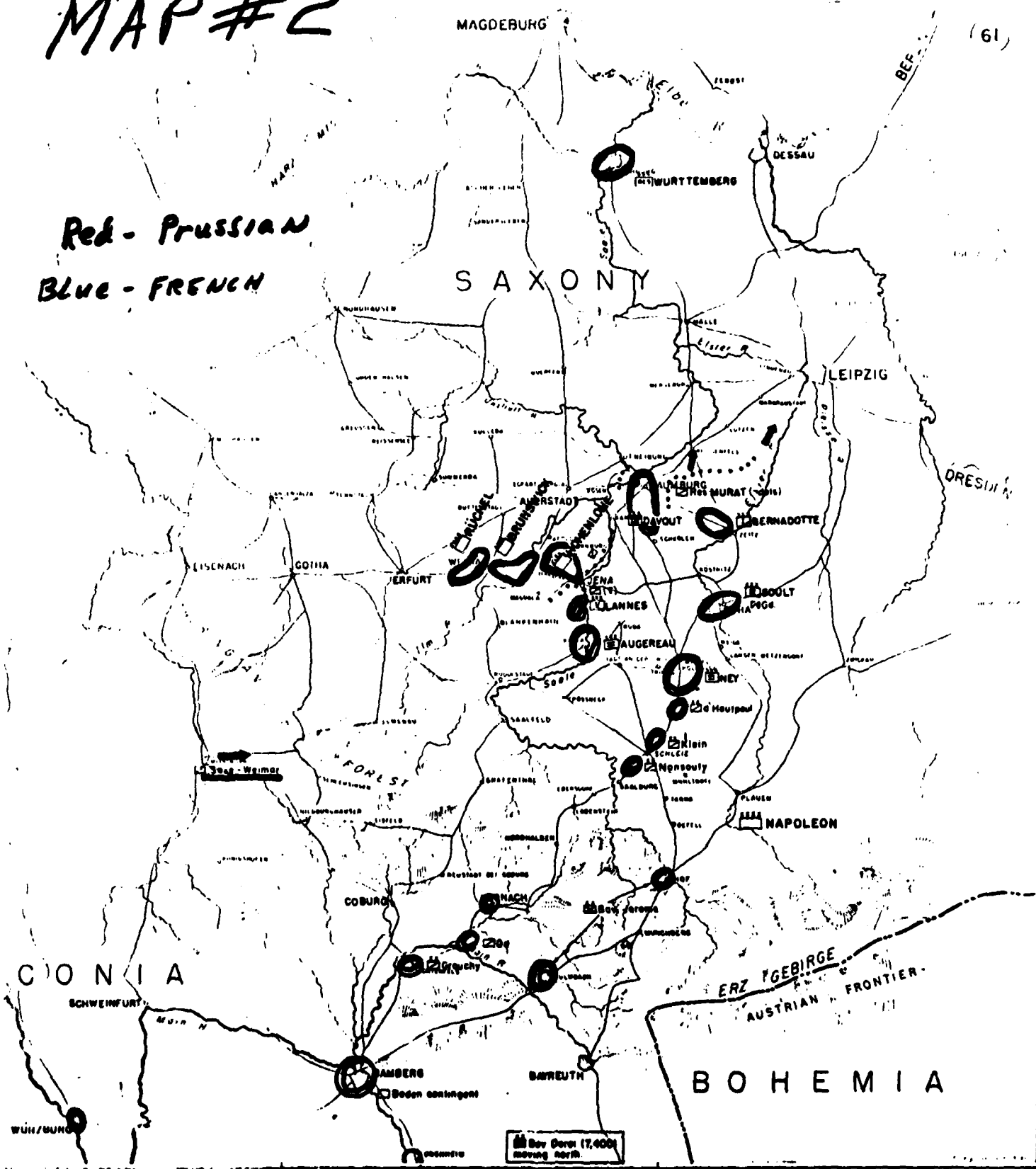
Situation Early September 1806



# MAP #2

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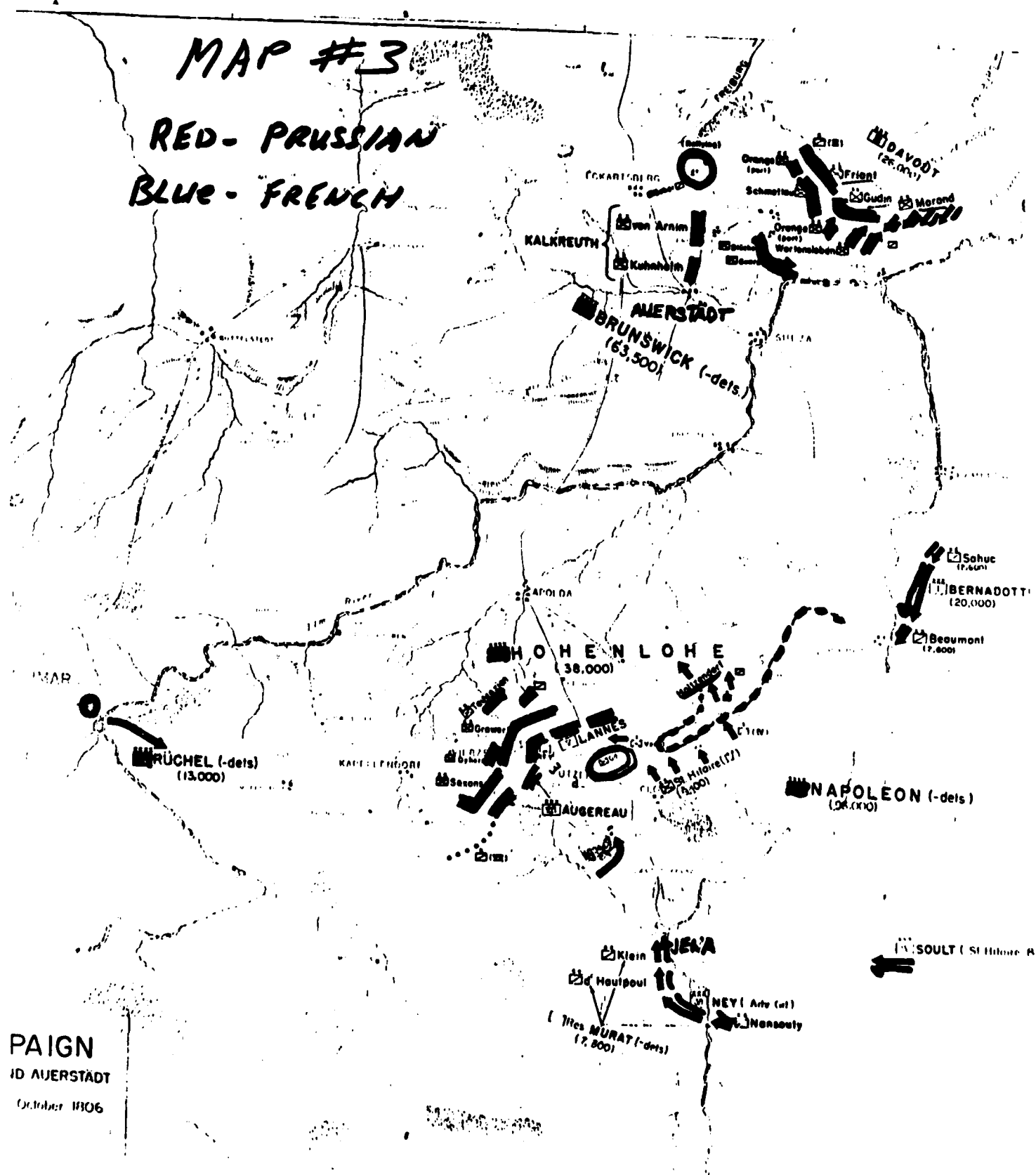
Red - Prussian  
Blue - French



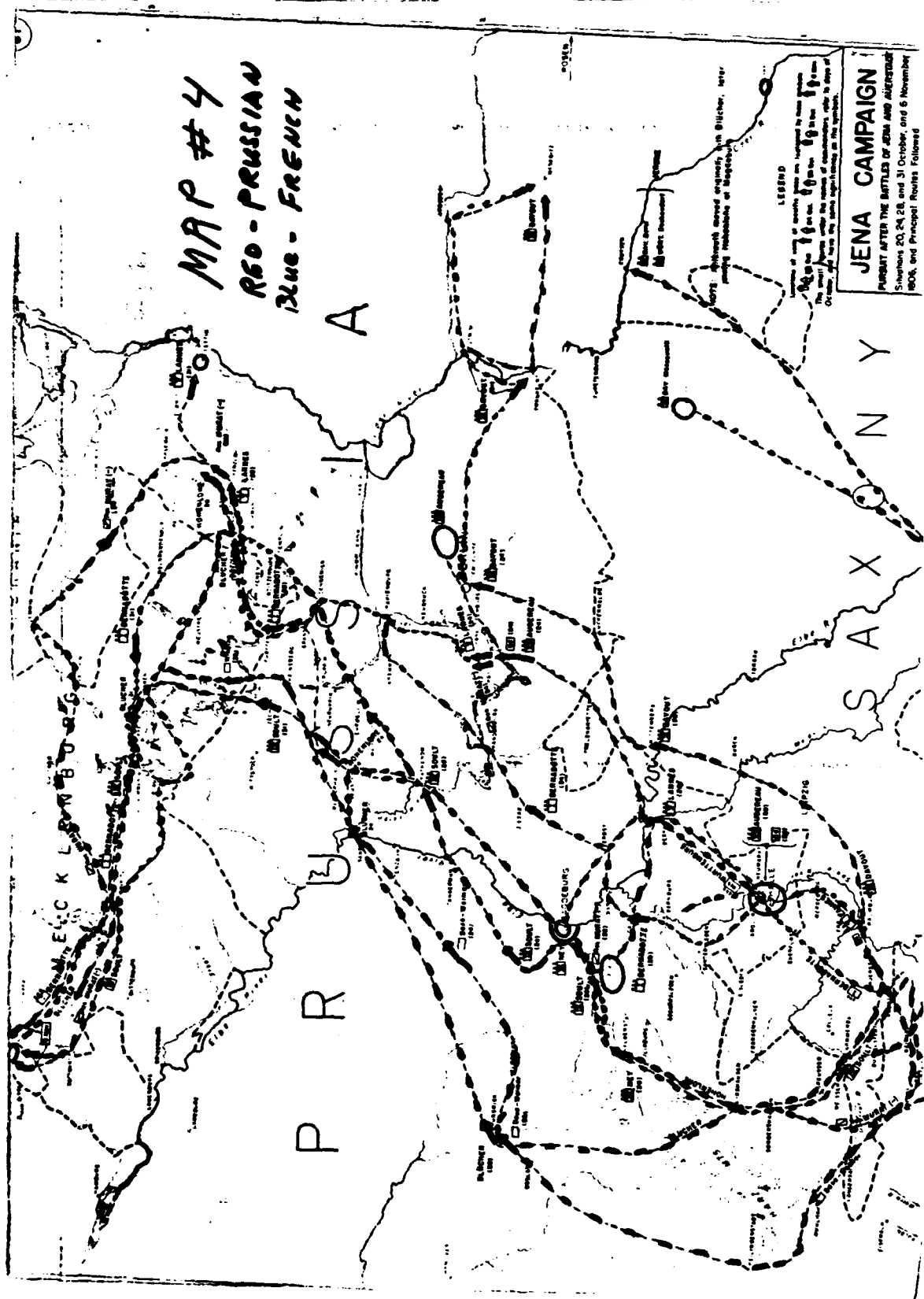
# MAP #3

## RED - PRUSSIAN

## BLUE - FRENCH







MAP #4  
R60 - PRUSSIAN  
Blue - FRENCH

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S A X O N Y

JENA CAMPAIGN  
PURSUIT AFTER THE BATTLES OF JENA AND AUSTERLITZ  
Sept 20, 24, 26, and 31 October, and 6 November  
1806 and Principal Routes Followed

LEGEND  
The solid line shows the route of the French army from Jena to Austerlitz.  
The dashed line shows the route of the Prussian army from Jena to Austerlitz.  
The dotted line shows the route of the French army from Austerlitz to Leipzig.

# ENDNOTES

1. F.N. Maude, The Jena Campaign, p. 126.
2. Ibid., p. 46.
3. Albert S. Britt III, Jena Campaign Studies, p. 239.
4. Maude, p. 9.
5. Vincent J. Esposito and Jogn R. Elting, A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars, p. 61.
6. Maude, p. 119.
7. Esposito and Elting, p. 59.
8. Maude, p. 122.
9. Esposito and Elting, p. 63.
10. Maude, p. 175.
11. The four maps used in the paper are respectively maps from pages 57, 61, 64, and 67 from the Vincent J. Esposito and John R. Elting book, A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars.

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